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TO RECOVERY AND BEYOND

2021 UNESCO Report on Public Access to Information (SDG 16.10.2)

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SHORT SUMMARY

Building forward stronger with Access to Information

As countries are trying to emerge from the pandemic, the role of access to information continues to be critical in re-building communities and their public institutions. The need for openness, transparency and accountability has never been stronger. The world has witnessed a growing public's appetite for information that is accurate, timely and reliable. With civic space becoming more reduced during the pandemic, access to information has helped counterbalanced the situation, enabling public participation and civic engagement in response to the crisis.

As the UN custodian agency for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicator 16.10.2, UNESCO continues to report not only on progress on the adoption and the implementation of Access to Information guarantees worldwide, but also promotes efforts around the issue, including reinforcing the strong relevance of access to information to the crisis recovery and the attainment of the SDGs as a whole.

This report captures these different dimensions, presenting key findings from the 2021 UNESCO Survey on Public Access to Information, assessing progress in 102 participating countries. The report also provides policy makers, civil society, academia and those interested in SDG issues with different case studies and good practices with a special focus on rebuilding communities and public institutions with access to information.

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"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

* as of August 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal 16:

"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels and inclusive societies."

Target 16.10:

"Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements."

Indicator 16.10.1:

"Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months."

** OHCHR as Custodian Agency; UNESCO and ILO as Contributing Agencies*

Indicator 16.10.2:

"Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information."

** UNESCO as Custodian Agency*

As countries are trying to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of **access to information** (ATI) continues to be critical in **rebuilding communities** and **strengthening** their **public institutions**.

Since the spread of COVID-19 in early 2020, the world has witnessed a growing public demand for information that is accurate, timely and reliable. The need for **openness**, **transparency**, and **accountability** has never been stronger. With civic space becoming more reduced during the pandemic, and false content ever expanding, access to information has helped counterbalance the situation, serving as a tool for transparency, through which the public could exercise their right to request for information. This has enabled **public participation** and **civic engagement** in response to the crisis.

As the UN custodian agency for SDG Indicator 16.10.2, UNESCO continues to report on progress on the adoption and the implementation of Access to Information legal

guarantees worldwide. The Organization also promotes efforts to advocate for access to public information, including reinforcing its relevance to crisis recovery and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This report captures these different dimensions, presenting **key findings** from the 2021 UNESCO Survey on Public Access to Information and offering different **case studies** and **good practices** with a special focus on rebuilding communities and public institutions with access to information.

This year's survey adopted a revised methodology, taking into account feedback from participating countries and independent experts in 2020. The new methodology was also tested by over 80 representatives of oversight institutions responsible for access to information worldwide, and further validated by the UN's Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. Launched in April 2021, the survey engaged responses by **102 countries and** territories, an increase by 48% compared to the previous year. This positive trend demonstrates a growing enthusiasm among countries in reporting on 'Access to Information' within the framework of the SDGs.

The **2021 survey** has yielded **insights** into the main tendencies in the implementation of legal guarantees for public access to information worldwide. The findings enable a better understanding of the gaps and challenges that need to be addressed by countries in their efforts towards achieving this SDG target.

Among countries with ATI legal guarantees, the survey noted a positive trend towards acknowledging **the importance of a dedicated arrangement within public bodies** to deal with access to information, which in itself sets the foundation for proactive and reactive disclosure.

Another finding is that countries that have a **specialized oversight institution** for access to information are likely to **perform better** than those without. On the other hand, the survey flagged some inconsistencies in data and information, signalling that **record-keeping** remains one of the major areas of improvement for these oversight institutions. Since what cannot be measured cannot be improved, it is essential to ensure adequate and reliable records of the requests and appeals received, so that evidence can be generated to track progress.

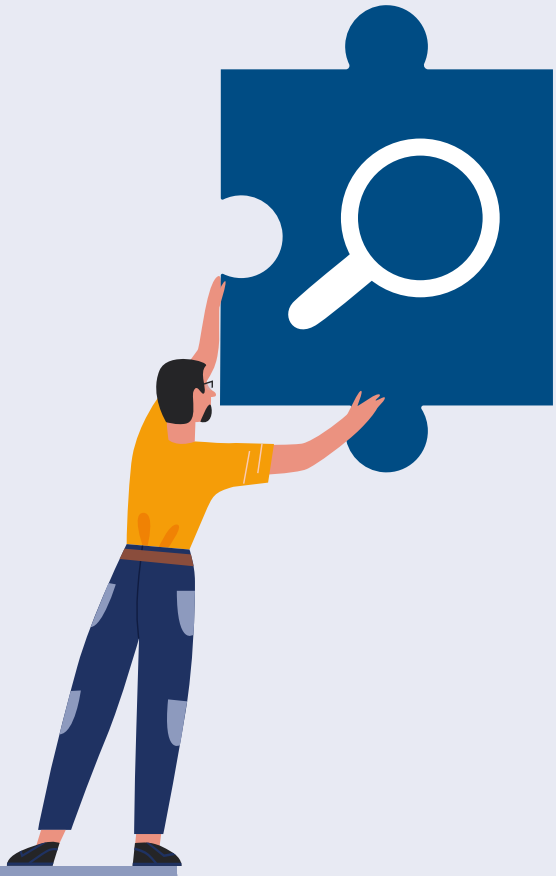
The rolling-out the survey also demonstrated the **important role of networks of oversight institutions in advocating for SDG monitoring and reporting**, as well **as mobilizing their members** in taking part in global-wide activities related to the SDGs. This was made evident by the fact that 80% of the respondents are members of the International Conference of Information Commissioners, the International Ombudsman Institute and Red de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información. These networks could serve as platforms, through which SDG monitoring and reporting could be improved over time, contributing to effective implementation of ATI guarantees.

Reporting on SDG 16.10.2 serves as an incentive for countries to improve their legal regulatory frameworks, their implementation and/or their enforcement. In this regard, the annual UNESCO survey, which provides a standardised approach to monitoring SDG 16.10.2, has proven useful for countries in measuring and reporting progress at the national level, including in their **Voluntary National Reviews** (VNRs) of progress made on the SDGs. This was evident in Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Uruguay, which have used the data collected through the survey to report on their ATI progress in their VNRs. In this regard, this report also presents an analysis of countries' reporting on SDG 16.10.2 in the VNRs since 2019. In 2021, out of 42 countries that submitted their reviews to the VNR process, **28 countries (67%)** reported on 'access to information'.

While **132 UN Member States** have adopted various ATI legal guarantees, states that have not adopted such guarantees could boost access to information for their citizens by considering similar steps. As demonstrated by **case studies** and **good practices** in this report, for countries confronted with the urgent need to recover from the pandemic, build public trust, strengthen their institutions, improve public service delivery and address corruption, access to information can serve as a means to achieve these objectives.

With only nine years left to achieve the SDGs by 2030, and with global challenges becoming more interconnected, the message is clear that access to information should be the thread that binds together diverse actions towards the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond.

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT



1.1. Access to Information and Sustainable Development

Conceptually, 'public access to information' refers to the presence of an effective system to meet citizens' rights to seek and receive information, particularly that held by or on behalf of public authorities.

Access to information (ATI) has been recognised as a key element of sustainable development since the adoption of the Rio Declaration in 1992.[1] Further in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[2] acknowledged access to information as a necessary enabling mechanism for transparent, accountable and participatory governance, rule of law and peaceful societies as epitomised by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 16: 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions'. Target 16.10 calls for states to "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements".

The Human Rights Council in its 2020 resolution on freedom of opinion and expression (General Assembly A/HRC/RES/44/12)[3] at its 44th regular session recognises that "public authorities should strive to make information available, whether the information is proactively published electronically or provided upon request..." .

The Windhoek +30 Declaration[4] was adopted on 3 May 2021, during the global celebration event of the World Press Freedom Day, affirming the need to uphold information as a public good that serves as a shared resource for the whole of humanity. Emphasizing the importance of press freedom, independence and pluralism to guarantee access to information, the Declaration also sets out recommendations to secure information as a public good by addressing media viability, promoting Internet company transparency and enhancing citizens' media and information literacy competencies.

Within the perspective of the 2030 Agenda, access to information is critical for empowering the public to make decisions, holding governments accountable, evaluating public officials in implementing and monitoring the SDGs, and facilitating effective public participation.

This has been well attested to during the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by a growing public demand for information that is accurate, timely and reliable. The need for openness, transparency, and accountability has never been stronger. Where civic space was shrinking and disinformation and misinformation expanding, access to information has helped counterbalance the situation, playing its role as a tool for transparency, through which the public could exercise their right to information. This has facilitated public participation and promoted civic engagement in response to the crisis. But there are challenges.

The Latin American Anti-Corruption Network (REAL), for instance, has published data on the level of transparency in eight countries in the region during the pandemic, including within the scope of access to information.[5] Their data show that very few countries have periodic and accessible data on public spending during the pandemic.[6] Securing access to such information allows the public to harness the potential of data for holding governments accountable.

In coming out of the pandemic, the role of access to information continues to be critical in re-building communities and their public institutions. This has been made evident in the recent study carried out by UNDP's Oslo Governance Centre and the German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik), which is reported on in Chapter 4 of this report. The study underlined the role of access to information in COVID-19 recovery, namely, social protection, equal opportunities and poverty. The study suggested that improved access to information also increases awareness of target populations and improves social protection programmes.

1.2. UNESCO and the monitoring and reporting on SDG Indicator 16.10.2

Standard-setting on monitoring and reporting

Following the approval of the SDG framework in 2017 by the UN General Assembly, UNESCO was designated as the custodian agency for Indicator 16.10.2. Under this mandate, UNESCO monitors and reports to the UN Secretary-General each year on "the number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information", giving attention to both components: "adoption" and "implementation".

1 https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/unep-implementing-principle-10-rio-declaration
2 Adopted in 2015 by all 193 UN member states, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication) is a 15-year plan of action "to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, while strengthening universal peace in larger freedom".
3 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3877197?ln=fr
4 https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/windhoek30declaration_wpfd_2021.pdf
5 http://redanticorrupcion.com/informes/covid-y-corrupcion/
6 https://www.sdg16hub.org/group/southern-voice-undp-sdg-16-trends-and-emerging-issues/topic/civil-societys-role-promoting

In the Decision of the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) on Monitoring and Reporting of SDG Indicator 16.10.2, adopted in November 2018[7], the IPDC Council encouraged the IPDC Secretariat, in cooperation with the Organization's Information For All Programme (IFAP), to develop a mechanism that could strengthen UNESCO's work as custodian agency for the global monitoring of progress. The Council further urged that the mechanism involve and support countries in the data collection and reporting on SDG Indicator 16.10.2.

As a response to the Decision, UNESCO and its Institute for Statistics (UIS) developed a methodology to help measure and report on Indicator 16.10.2. This consists of a survey developed in consultation[8] with experts, concerned organizations, and the IFAP Secretariat. UNESCO believes that when countries engage themselves in a self-assessment through the survey, they can identify their own gaps in terms of implementation of ATI laws, and better strategize for future improvements.

The survey was piloted in 2019 in 43 countries that submitted the Voluntary National Reviews on SDG progress that year, with the findings presented at a side-event during the UN's High-Level Political Forum in July 2019.

The survey instrument was later refined for a full deployment in 2020 and was subsequently further improved for the 2021 cycle. In this regard, UNESCO conducted an online consultation with a group of experts in November 2020 to propose an upgraded methodology of the survey. In collaboration with the International Conference of Information Commissioners and the Regional Network of Access to Information Practitioners in Latin America and the Caribbean (Red de transparencia y acceso ala información, RTA), three consultation sessions were organised in February 2021 to test the updated survey with the participation of around 80 representatives from oversight institutions responsible for ATI worldwide.

Following the launch of the survey in April 2021, three sessions offering online clinics were also organized to assist countries in completing the survey, with a view to avoiding errors and ensuring the quality of data. In July 2021, the UN's Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) validated the updated metadata for Indicator 16.10.2, which includes the use of the survey to collect the data annually.[9]

Since the pilot phase in 2019, the UNESCO survey has brought impact beyond measuring countries' progress on achieving SDG Target 16.10. Many local actors, including ATI oversight bodies and civil society actors, have been mobilised to network with each other in collecting data for the survey. Some countries have also used the information assembled to identify areas of improvement. As such, the survey is not only contributing to assessing SDG Indicator 16.10.2, but also to securing ATI implementation. The utility of the data collection on SDG 16.10.2 was also acknowledged by the IPDC Council at its 32nd session (November 2020), on the basis that it provides evidence-based analysis for the improvement of access to information as a factor for sustainable development.

Capacity-building and awareness raising

In the 2018 Decision of the IPDC Council referred to the above, the IPDC Secretariat, Council and Bureau were encouraged to keep supporting Member States in data collection and reporting on SDG indicator 16.10.2 on access to information. Further, in its 2020 decision, the Council invited the Bureau to' continue supporting grassroot projects that will help Member States in data collection and reporting on SDG indicator 16.10.2, including by strengthening monitoring and reporting capacities of oversight bodies responsible for ATI.

In this regard, with the support of various donors to the IPDC, UNESCO has been able to facilitate capacity development initiatives and awareness raising efforts in several countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Tunisia, as well as in the Latin American region[10]. This line of action has been done through collaboration with information commissioners and their networks, such as the International Conference of Information Commissioners and Red de Transparencia y Acceso a la Informacion.

The IPDC Council, in both the 2018 and 2020 decisions, also encouraged countries to monitor progress on ATI, including through the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) system, which offers an opportunity to follow-up and review mechanisms on SDG 16 (Section 3 of this report further discusses the VNRs). In this regard, participating in the UNESCO Survey on Public Access to Information has been proven to be useful for countries as they can repurpose the data submitted to the survey for their VNRs. For instance, Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Uruguay have used the data collected through the survey to also report on their ATI progress in their VNRs.

7 https://en.unesco.org/news/ipdc-council-encourages-further-development-mechanism-monitor-and-report-access-information
8 https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-convenes-experts-advance-monitoring-and-reporting-access-information
9 In 2019, the IAEG-SDG upgraded Indicator 16.10.2 from Tier II to Tier I —the highest level in the classification system developed to rank SDG indicators.
10 While activities in the Latin and American region were mostly carried out through a regional approach, UNESCO is also supporting national initiatives, for example in Honduras and in Mexico.

UNESCO has also been engaged in various joint efforts with other UN entities and civil society. Under the umbrella of the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies[11], collaboration has been established through a series of events and workshops, as well as the development of guidelines and resources to support countries in their monitoring and reporting on SDG 16. As part of the "SDG 16 National Monitoring Initiative" – a project on monitoring national progress on Goal 16, an online workshop took place in April 2021 for stakeholders in Mexico, Moldova and Tunisia. Under the spirit of #OneUN, UNESCO also started this year a new collaboration with OHCHR, UNDP, UNODC and UNESCAP through a series of regional training workshops to measure SDG 16. The first edition of the online training was held between April and June 2021 for the Latin American region, garnering around 1,600 participants from civil society and government institutions. The second edition, targeted at national stakeholders in the Asia and Pacific region, will be organised between September and November 2021.

The annual celebration of the International Day for Universal Access to Information on 28 September constitutes a keystone of UNESCO's awareness raising efforts on access to information. The Day was declared by UNESCO's 38th General Conference in 2015. The status of the celebration was elevated in October 2019, when the 74th UN General Assembly proclaimed the Day at UN level.[12] The Day continues to provide a platform for UNESCO to discuss key findings of data collection on SDG 16.10.2, as well as to disseminate takeaways from studies on access to information and cross-cutting issues, such as gender and persons with disabilities.

All this momentum has accompanied and reinforced concrete steps towards tracking progress on ATI.

11 The Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies (https://www.un-globalalliance.org/) is a coordinating platform for Member States, private sector, civil society and UN entities to work together towards the achievement of SDG 16. The Alliance is operated by seven Member States (Cabo Verde, Mexico, Norway, Qatar, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), three civil society organisations (NYU Centre on International Cooperation: The Transparency and Accountability Network, and the World Federation of United Nations Associations), and three private sector companies (Deloitte Ltd., LexisNexis, and White & Case LLP). Its work is supported by a Secretariat co-facilitated by UNDP, UNODC, UNESCO, OHCHR, UNHCR, UN Women, and the Global Compact (a UN Advisory Group composed of 10 UN agencies, and partners from other governments, civil society organisations and private sector actors).

12 https://en.unesco.org/news/proclaims-international-day-universal-access-information

2.
TRACKING PROGRESS ON SDG INDICATOR 16.10.2 IN 2021

2.1. Global overview: Adoption of ATI legal guarantees

Progress has been recorded in terms of binding laws and policies giving individuals a right to access information held by public authorities. As of August 2021, 132 UN Member States have adopted constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information, with at least 22 countries adopting such guarantees since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015.[13] In 2021, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia joined the list.[14]

Table 1. UN Member States that have adopted constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information (grouped based on the execution of regional activities by UNESCO)

Europe and North America (50)				
1. Albania	12. Czechia	23. Israel[15]	34. Norway	44. Spain
2. Armenia	13. Denmark	24. Italy	35. Poland	45. Sweden
3. Austria	14. Estonia	25. Latvia	36. Portugal	46. Switzerland
4. Azerbaijan	15. Finland	26. Liechtenstein[16]	37. Republic of Moldova	47. Turkey
5. Belarus	16. France	27. Lithuania	38. Romania	48. Ukraine
6. Belgium	17. Georgia	28. Luxembourg	39. Russian Federation	49. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
7. Bosnia and Herzegovina	18. Germany	29. Malta	40. San Marino	
8. Bulgaria	19. Greece	30. Monaco	41. Serbia	50. United States of America[17]
9. Canada	20. Hungary	31. Montenegro	42. Slovakia	
10. Croatia	21. Iceland	32. Netherlands	43. Slovenia	
11. Cyprus	22. Ireland	33. North Macedonia		
Latin America and the Caribbean (25)				
51. Antigua and Barbuda	56. Brazil	61. Ecuador	67. Mexico	73. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
52. Argentina	57. Chile	62. El Salvador	68. Nicaragua	74. Trinidad and Tobago
53. Bahamas	58. Colombia	63. Guatemala	69. Panama	75. Uruguay
54. Belize	59. Costa Rica	64. Guyana	70. Paraguay	
55. Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	60. Dominican Republic	65. Honduras	71. Peru	
		66. Jamaica	72. Saint Kitts and Nevis	
Asia and the Pacific (27)				
76. Afghanistan	82. India	87. Kyrgyzstan	93. Palau	98. Thailand
77. Australia	83. Indonesia	88. Maldives	94. Philippines	99. Timor-Leste
78. Bangladesh	84. Iran (Islamic Republic of)	89. Mongolia	95. Republic of Korea	100. Uzbekistan
79. China	85. Japan	90. Nepal	96. Sri Lanka	101. Vanuatu
80. Cook Islands	86. Kazakhstan	91. New Zealand	97. Tajikistan	102. Viet Nam
81. Fiji		92. Pakistan		
Africa (22)				
103. Angola	107. Ethiopia	112. Malawi	117. Seychelles	122. Uganda
104. Benin	108. Ghana	113. Mozambique	118. Sierra Leone	123. United Republic of Tanzania
105. Burkina Faso	109. Guinea	114. Niger	119. South Africa	124. Zimbabwe
106. Côte d'Ivoire	110. Kenya	115. Nigeria	120. South Sudan	
	111. Liberia	116. Rwanda	121. Togo	
Arab States (8)				
125. Jordan	127. Lebanon	129. Saudi Arabia	131. Tunisia	
126. Kuwait	128. Morocco	130. Sudan	132. Yemen	

13 Argentina, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Fiji, Ghana, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malawi, Morocco, Vanuatu, Philippines, Timor-Leste, Saudi Arabia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, Togo, United Republic of Tanzania.

14 The Gambia also passed the Access to Information Bill in July 2021, yet as of the writing of this report in August 2021, the Bill has yet to be included in the official gazette, hence it has not yet included in the list.

15 Israel withdrew from UNESCO on 31 December 2018.

16 Lichtenstein is not a member of UNESCO.

17 The United States of America withdrew from UNESCO on 31 December 2018.

2.2. Reaching the furthest behind first: Inclusion of disability rights in ATI guarantees[18]

> . . . when accessible information and communications are not available, a range of persons with different disabilities cannot effectively benefit from public policies and programmes."
>
> **Catalina Devandas-Aguilar,** Former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, the 71st Session of UN General Assembly, 2016.

The importance of access to information (ATI) as an internationally recognised human right for all, including for **persons with disabilities**, has long been acknowledged. However, the realisation of this right for those with disabilities remains a challenge.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, pledging to "endeavour to reach the furthest behind first", calls upon countries to ensure the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and to create enabling environments by, for and with persons with disabilities, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The CRPD recognises that civil and political rights, including the right to information, are a vital prerequisite for persons with disabilities to overcome histories of exclusion. First, the CPRD discusses equality for persons with disabilities in accessing information. Second, it places the right to information in the context of disability accessibility.[19]

In the same spirit, Article 21 explicitly states that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice […]".

ATI laws in several countries acknowledge the importance of accessibility to information by persons with disabilities. Based on an analysis for the 127 countries with ATI laws in 2020[20], **37** countries explicitly refer to persons with disabilities and their rights, to varying degrees.[21] The common themes in these legislations relate to **placing a request for access to information**, **forms in which access is provided**, **conditions for delivery of accessible formats**, and **provision of further assistance to persons with disabilities**. With regard to placing a request for access to information, 11 countries allow applicants with disabilities to submit an oral request where a written one would normally be required.[22] Additionally, six countries require the information provider to assist the person with disabilities in submitting the request when their disability prevents them from doing so in a manner generally prescribed by the law.[23]

Of the 11 countries that specifically mention the provision of information to persons with disabilities in an accessible format, 10 use broad wording that refers to an "alternative format" or a similar concept. Of these, three limit the provision of alternative formats to conditions such as cost, as well as time and copyright law restrictions. One country only refers to content accessibility for persons with disabilities when information is provided on websites.

The above figures highlight the **challenges** for effective access to information for persons with disabilities. First and foremost, it is evident that **the rights of persons with disabilities are absent from most ATI legislations**. Where reference is made to persons with disabilities and accessibility of information, the scope of the disabilities covered and the rights secured for persons with disabilities are rather **limited**, or **not always clear**. Furthermore, the research showed that **effective accessibility criteria are missing** from many existing legislative frameworks, or that their implementation is hindered by factors such as inadequate awareness and training around the rights of persons with disabilities and insufficient funding. Ignoring the **issues of cost** or imposing **restrictive conditions** on access for persons with disabilities are amongst the challenges highlighted when assessing the existing ATI legislation. Finally, the **lack of appeal and oversight mechanisms** and meaningful data on the state of accessibility for persons with disabilities also act as obstacles for provision of satisfactory information accessibility.

18 Extracted from a study commissioned by UNESCO to independent researcher Lida Ayoubi, PhD. For the purpose of this Report, only the most relevant findings are presented.
19 CRPD, articles 9(1) and 21(a).
20 As recorded by UNESCO in 2020.
21 These countries are Afghanistan, Antigua, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, India, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Mexico, Montenegro, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leon, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, Vanuatu, and Vietnam.
22 These countries are Afghanistan, Antigua, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Maldives, Saint Kitts and Nevis, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.
23 These countries are Kenya, Liberia, Pakistan, Seychelles, Ukraine, and Vietnam.

Shortfalls of national provisions on ATI and disability issues

(Based on an assessment of 37 national legislation with provisions on the rights of persons with disabilities)

1. Reference to the rights of persons with disabilities is vague and brief.
2. The legislation does not provide a sufficiently comprehensive application of accessibility criteria to all government information.
3. The legislation does not clarify the scope of disabilities subject to the Act or is restrictive regarding the disabilities covered.
4. The legislation only refers to the submission of a request for access to information for persons with disabilities but not the provision of such access.
5. The legislation only covers direct requests for information by persons with disabilities without covering proactive disclosure.
6. The legislation does not cover the issue of the cost of making information accessible to persons with disabilities.
7. The legislation imposes restrictive conditions on provision of access to information for persons with disabilities.
8. The legislation does not provide for appeal and oversight mechanisms in relation to access to information for persons with disabilities.

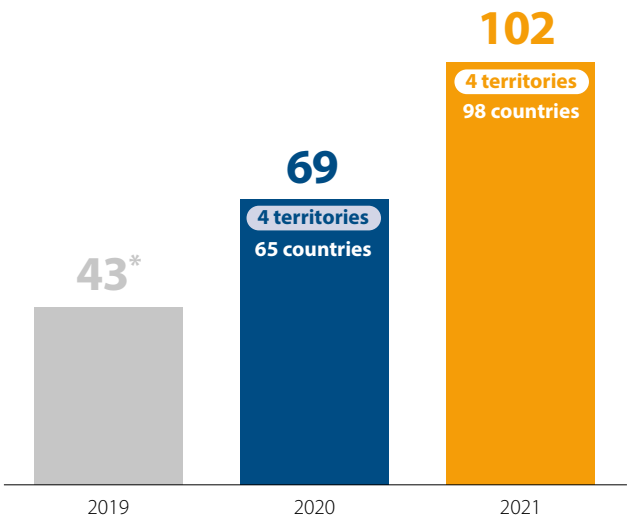
Monitoring of Indicator 16.10.2 provides an opportunity for countries and other concerned stakeholders to improve actual implementation of the provisions of normative instruments such as the CRPD. Countries should consider **steps towards an inclusive and comprehensive legislative framework** containing **minimum mandatory accessibility standards** that ensure access to information for persons with disabilities, without discrimination based on type of disability, geographical location, financial means, and language capabilities, among other factors.

2.3. Highlights from 2021 UNESCO Survey on Public Access to Information

2.3.1. Respondents and scores: There is a growing interest in reporting progress on 'Access to Information', and countries with dedicated oversight institutions perform better

In 2021, UNESCO invited all UN Member States, including associated territories, to participate in the survey based upon on SDG Indicator 16.10.2. The survey took place between April and June 2021. As many as **102** countries and territories, responded to the survey.[24]

Figure 1. Number of countries and territories that participated in UNESCO survey exercise from 2019-2021



* Pilot countries only: UN Member States that presented VNR reports at the 2019 UN HLPF

This year, UNESCO reduced the number of questions and introduced a scoring system in the survey's methodology, as per suggestions from the UN's IAEG-SDGs. The survey comprises 8 questions[25], each value between 0 and 2. Upon the completion of the survey, a country can get a total score of 0-9, enabling it to track progress over time. The total score of each country only contributes to **global analysis**, and **is not assigned** to any level category (e.g.: low, medium, or high).

Out of 79 countries and territories with ATI oversight institutions, 70% of them scored 7 and above. Meanwhile, 12 countries without ATI oversight institutions scored between 1 and 7.2.[26] This finding suggested that **countries that have a specialised ATI oversight body are likely to perform better than those without**.

In order to help establish a reporting link for SDG 16.10.2 at the national level, UNESCO sent the survey invitation this year to both the central oversight institutions responsible for access to information (e.g., information commission/er; data protection or privacy commission/er; national human

24 The four territories participating in the survey were Gibraltar, Isle of Man, Jersey and Cayman Islands. Gibraltar and Cayman Islands are non-self-governing territories administrated by the United Kingdom; The Isle of Man and Jersey are internally self-governing dependencies of the British Crown, United Kingdom.

25 The questions of the survey were based on "Principles of Access to Information", which were synthesized from existing frameworks and documents recognised internationally. For the purpose of this survey, the principles of relevance are as follows: (a) Legal frameworks for Access to Information; (b) Limited exemptions; (c) Oversight mechanism; (d) Appeals mechanism; (e) Record keeping and reporting. It is worth noting that while this survey is intended for the central ATI oversight institutions, there is another reporting instrument developed by UNESCO to collect data from public bodies (Departments/ Ministries/ Agencies), which also looks at the 'Proactive Disclosure' element, among other things. 'Proactive Disclosure' is not covered by the survey presented in this report, as it relates more to the performance of the public bodies, not the ATI oversight institutions. This other reporting instrument for the public bodies is of relevance to countries that are interested in having a more in-depth assessment on their ATI implementation.

26 These data need to be taken with caution, as the two countries with the score of 5.2 and 7.2 first reported their ATI guarantees did not specify the need for ATI oversight institutions, but later reported some activities done by these oversight institutions, which demonstrated an inconsistency.

rights institution; Ombuds institution; department/ ministry/ agency) and national SDG focal points (usually the national statistics offices). In some countries, the invitation was sent to only one of these entities, due the absence of one or another.

UNESCO also joined forces with networks of oversight institutions responsible for access to information, such as the International Conference of Information Commissioners, the International Ombudsman Institute and Red de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información (regional Latin American network of information commissioners) to increase participation of countries in the survey.

The exercise revealed that out of the 102 countries and territories that responded to the survey, 82 of them are members of such networks. This demonstrates the **important role of such networks in advocating for SDG monitoring and reporting**, as well **as mobilising their members** in taking part in global-wide activities related to the SDGs.

Although the survey also observed some issues related to the quality of responses (which are discussed in the next sub-section), UNESCO noted that such **coalition-building** is **key for addressing gaps in the SDG monitoring and reporting**. These networks could serve as platforms, through which SDG monitoring and reporting processes could be improved over time.

2.3.2. Legal frameworks on Access to Information: National regulation systems are increasingly conducive to public access to information

Out of the 102 countries and territories that responded to the survey, 89% (91)[27] indicated to have constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for ATI. Five countries indicated an absence of ATI guarantees, while six others reported that they are 'in progress' in adopting such guarantees.

Among those responding countries that have ATI legal guarantees, 11 adopted such guarantees since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015 (Argentina, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Kenya, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Morocco, Philippines, Sri Lanka, United Republic of Tanzania, and Vanuatu).

While constitutional guarantees may exist in these countries, the process of adopting statutory guarantees for public access to information includes consultations with the executive and legislative branches of government and civil society.

Out of the 91 countries and territories with ATI guarantees, 71% (65) reported that their respective guarantee specifies the need for public bodies (Ministry/Agency/Department) to **appoint public information officers or a specific unit** to handle requests for information by the public. In 62 countries, this provision applies to 'all public bodies', while it applies only to 'some public bodies' in three countries. An in-depth assessment is needed on whether this requirement is realised in reality, but nevertheless, this finding shows a positive trend towards acknowledging the importance of a dedicated arrangement within public bodies to deal with ATI, which in itself sets the foundation for both **proactive and reactive disclosure**. Since such a dedicated arrangement is ideally tasked with **record keeping and reporting**, this would also greatly contribute to the monitoring on ATI implementation.

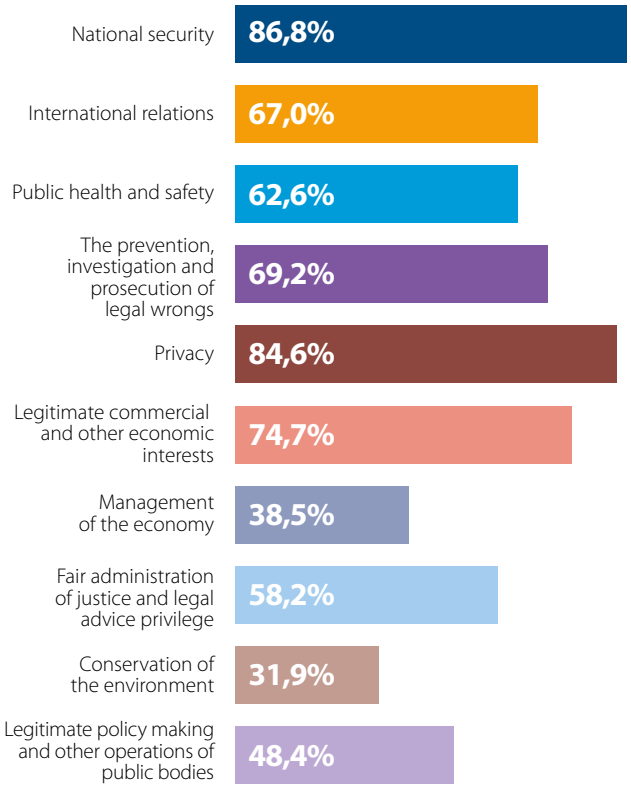
2.3.3. Limited scope of exemption: Most permissible exemptions are explicitly mentioned in ATI guarantees, but disaggregated data on refusals on this basis is still lacking

Exemptions allow the withholding of certain categories of information. Standards for exemptions mean that any such withholding must be based on narrow, proportionate, necessary and clearly defined limitations. Exemptions should apply only where there is a risk of substantial harm to a protected interest (as per the list in Figure 2 below), and where the harm is greater than the overall public interest in having access to the information. These exemptions are sometimes cited in relation to requests for information, and also for refusals in relation to declined initial requests.

Out of the 91 responding countries and territories with ATI guarantees, **81% (83)** reported that their respective ATI legal guarantee **explicitly mentions permissible exemptions** that are elaborated in well-defined categories whereby requests for information may be legally denied. The figure below shows the proportion of permissible exemptions in ATI legal guarantees, as indicated by the respondents.

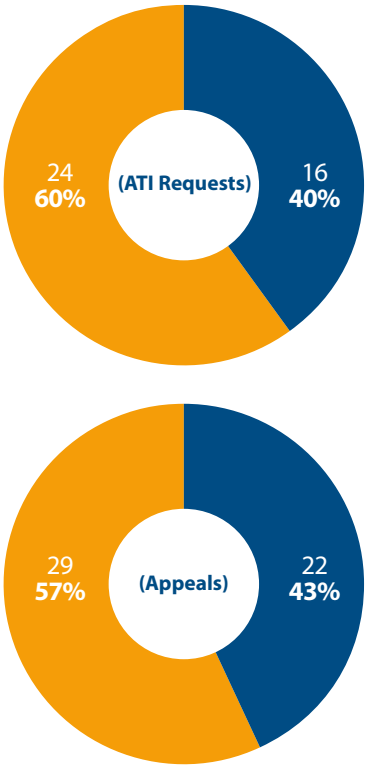
27 Responding countries and territories by UNESCO's groupings: (a) Africa: Benin; Botswana; Côte d'Ivoire; Equatorial Guinea; Ethiopia; Kenya; Liberia; Sierra Leone; South Africa; South Sudan; United Republic of Tanzania; (b) Arab States: Jordan; Kuwait; Morocco; Tunisia; (c) Asia and the Pacific: Afghanistan; Australia; Bangladesh; Cambodia; Cook Islands; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Vanuatu; (c) Europe and North America: Albania; Austria; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Belgium; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Canada; Croatia; Cyprus; Czechia; Denmark; Estonia; France; Georgia; Germany; Gibraltar; Hungary; Ireland; Isle of Man; Israel; Italy; Jersey; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; Montenegro; North Macedonia; Norway; Republic of Moldova; Romania; Serbia; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Switzerland; Turkey; Ukraine; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; United States of America; (d) Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina; Belize; Bolivia (Plurinational State of); Brazil; Cayman Islands; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Cuba; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; Guatemala; Honduras; Mexico; Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Uruguay. *Note: Israel and the United States of America withdrew from UNESCO on 31 December 2018.

Figure 2. Permissible exemptions in ATI legal guarantees



Going further, ATI oversight institutions in 24 out of 40 countries and territories that reported data on 'ATI requests' in 2020 reported that they kept disaggregated data on the reasons for non-disclosure and partial disclosure on the basis of the legitimate exemptions. As it relates to data on 'Appeals' in 2020, 29 out of 51 respondents reported to do so.

Figure 3. Countries that keep disaggregated data for non-disclosure and partial disclosure on the basis of the permissible exemptions in 2020



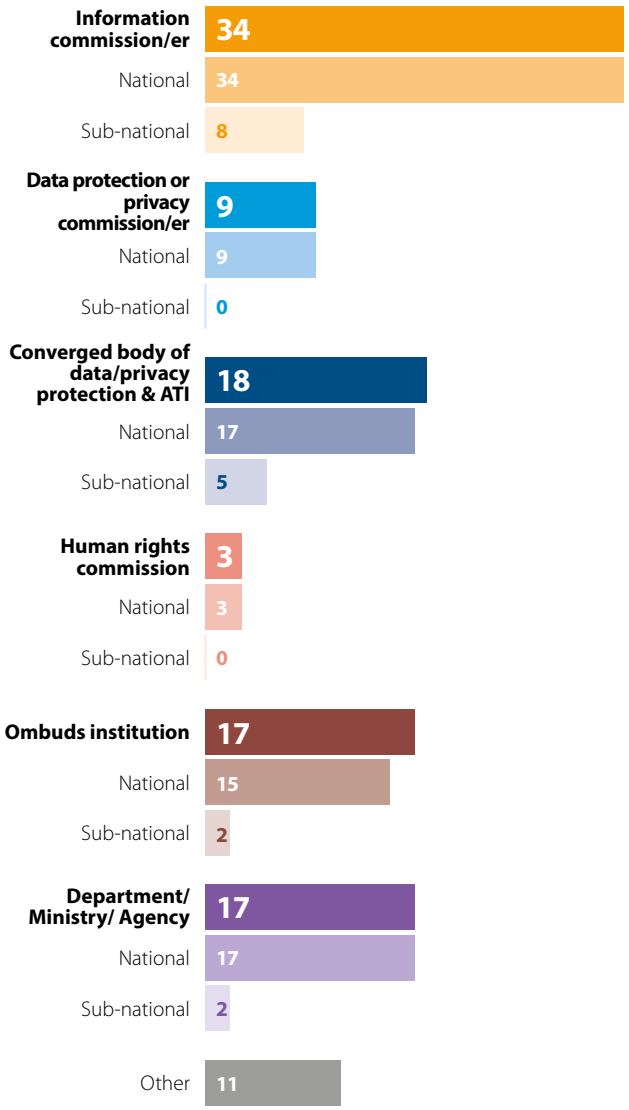
2.3.4. Oversight mechanism: Dedicated ATI oversight institutions are well established in most countries, but not all monitor implementation of ATI guarantees and enforce its compliance

An oversight institution refers to the institution charged with ensuring the process of supervision, monitoring, evaluation of performance and review, in order to ensure compliance with laws, regulations and policies. It therefore ensures accountability for the implementation of ATI. The same body or another may also do appeals, although hearing appeals is a distinct function from oversight and is sometimes done by a separate body. This is why in some countries, there exists more than one oversight institution, depending on the different tasks performed.

Out of the 91 responding countries and territories with ATI guarantees, **87% (79)** reported that their respective ATI legal guarantee specifies the need of a dedicated oversight institution(s). Information Commission/er is the most common type (34), followed with a converged body that combines data/privacy protection and ATI (18); Ombuds institution (17) and Department/ Ministry/ Agency (17); Other

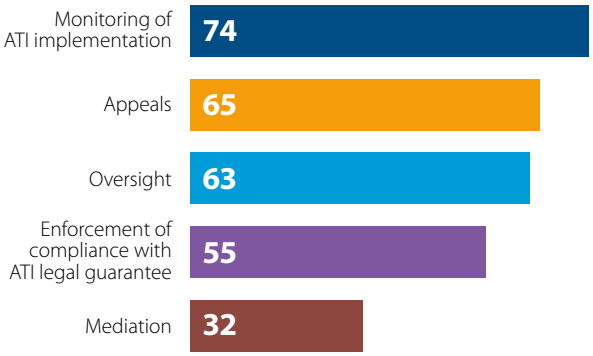
(11)[28]; Data protection or privacy commission/er (9); and Human Rights Commission (3).[29] In the majority of countries and territories, these institutions operate at the national level, with only few of them indicating the existence at the sub-national level.

Figure 4. Types of oversight institution



When it comes to the **roles** of the ATI oversight institutions as mandated by the guarantees, the majority of countries and territories responded 'Monitoring of ATI implementation' (74), followed with 'Appeals' (65); 'Oversight' (63); 'Enforcement of compliance with ATI legal guarantee' (55) and 'Mediation' (32).[30] 'Mediation' seems like the most uncommon role, but it is interesting to note that 50% of respondents in Africa (7 out of 15) and Latin America and the Caribbean (10 out of 20) reported on this role, indicating a small tendency in these regions to propose an alternative solution to resolve a dispute before proceeding to any formal procedure.

Figure 5. Roles of ATI oversight institutions as mandated by the legal guarantees



The **independence** of the oversight institution is essential to it playing an effective role. Such independence can at least be observed from the appointment process of the head of the oversight institution; how the institution is financed, and to whom it directly reports about its activities.

The survey revealed that out of the 91 responding countries and territories with ATI laws, the majority of them (44) indicated that **the head of the ATI oversight institution** is appointed by the 'Executive'.[31] The 'Legislative' branch is the second most answered (27), followed with 'Other' (16) and 'Judiciary' (1).

On the **approval of the budget** for the ATI oversight institution, the 'Legislative' branch is the most answered (47) and followed with 'Executive (34). Meanwhile, although seven countries indicated 'Other' in their responses, further observation found that some of the explanation provided were either not sufficient or raised other questions.[32]

28 Some countries and territories that opted for 'Other' indicated they have more than one institution that carry out the oversight mechanism, which cannot be precisely put under any of the survey's categories. Italy, for instance, mentioned "Ombudsman for local administration and Commission for the access to public document-Public Administration Government Department, while Austria noted "Administrative Courts, Highest Administrative Court, Constitutional Court, Ombudsman Board". Peru referred 'Other' to "*la Autoridad Nacional de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública* (ANTAIP) and *el Tribunal de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública* (TTAIP) – both of which are part of the organic structure of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. Meanwhile, Bulgaria indicated "Administrative Reform Council"; France "*Conseil d'Etat, juridictions administratives*"; Serbia "Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data protection"; Turkey "The Review Board of Access to Information"; and Uruguay "*Unidad de Acceso a la Información Pública* (UAIP).

29 For this question, a country could choose one or more types, as applicable.

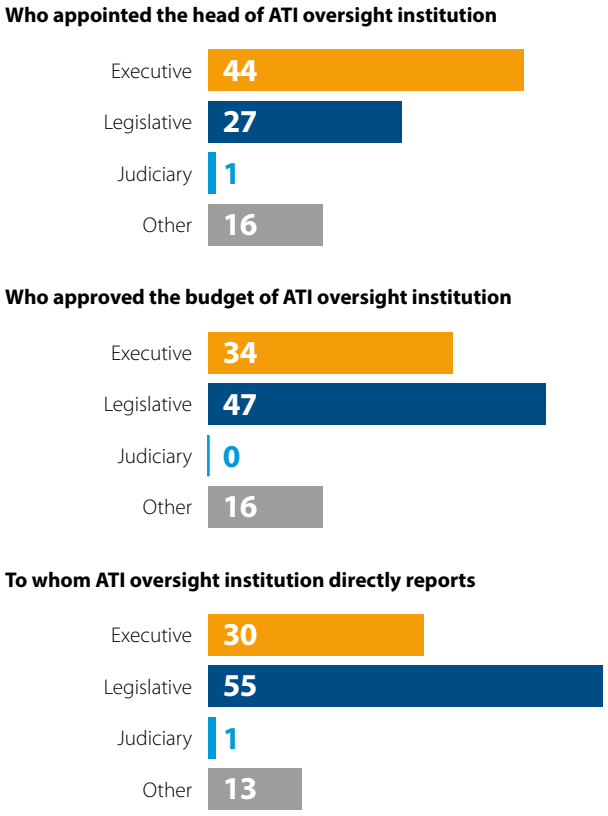
30 For this question, respondents could choose one or more types, as applicable. It is worth noting that although the survey uses the term 'oversight institution' to cover different entities responsible for ATI, some countries and territories in reality put a more specific distinction between an 'oversight institution' and a 'supervisory institution', hence they did not choose the 'oversight' role in their answer to this question.

31 For this question, respondents could choose one or more branches of government, as applicable.

32 One of the countries, for instance, mentioned "the Parliament, based on proposal from the Ministry".

On the question about **to whom the ATI oversight institution directly reports about its activities**, the 'Legislative' branch is the most answered (55) and followed with 'Executive (30). Only one country answered 'Judiciary', while 13 indicated 'Other'. For the latter, some answered that they directly report to "the public", while others explained they do not report to any government branches. Meanwhile some countries either put "president", a specific "ministry" or "parliament" under 'Other', although these can actually be regarded either as 'Executive' or 'Legislative' although this assessment has not been used to change the data for the statistics provided in this report.

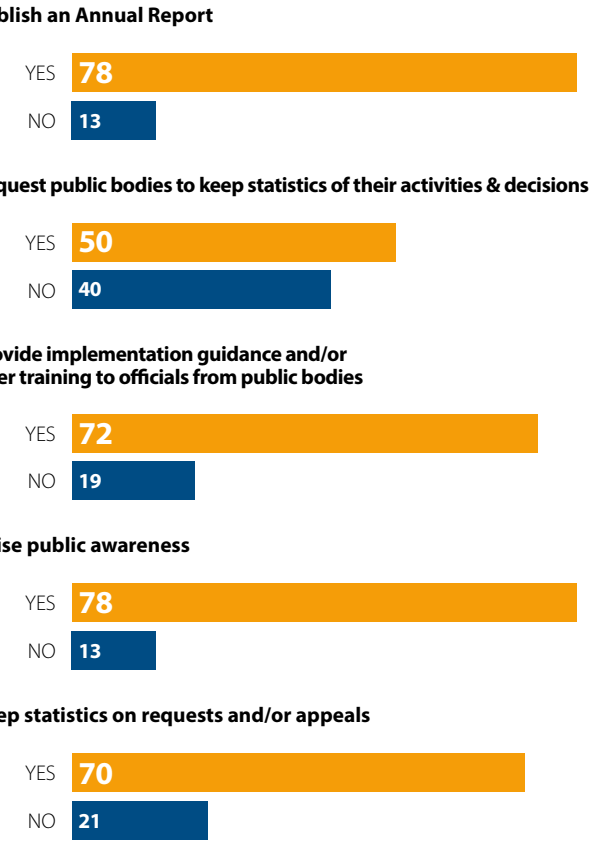
Figure 6. Appointment, financing and reporting



On the question about **the activities performed by the dedicated ATI oversight institutions** in 2020, publishing an annual report was reported by 78 countries and territories. The same number of respondents also reported that they sensitised the public on Access to Information. The third activity implemented by ATI oversight institutions was providing a guidance to officials from public bodies (72), followed by keeping statistics on request and appeals (70) and requesting public bodies to keep statistics on their activities and decisions.

However, there is a caveat here. Some countries and territories that reported on keeping statistics did not provide further data to UNESCO in their response to the following questions. On the contrary, few others reported that they did not keep statistics, but nevertheless still provided data. This reflects some inconsistencies in record-keeping practices.

Figure 7. Activities of ATI oversight institutions in 2020



Other kinds of additional activities are mentioned by respondents. These initiatives can also be considered good practices, beyond the elementary prerogatives of ATI oversight institutions. Here is non-exhaustive list as reported in the survey responses:

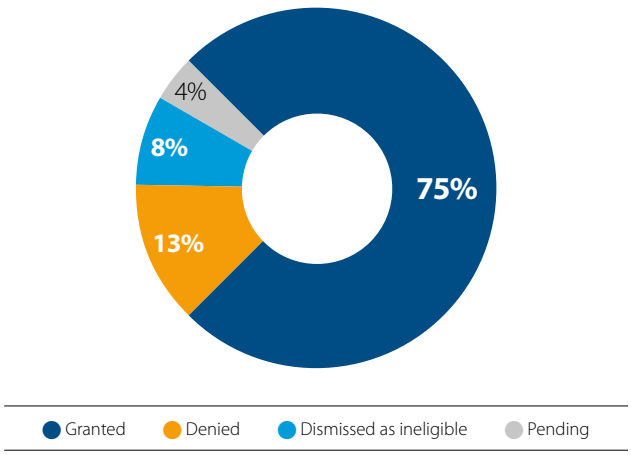
- Monitoring the State's compliance with international treaty obligations related to Access to information;
- Monitoring and enforcing compliance with proactive disclosure of information, records management and the recruitment of public information officers by public bodies;
- Ensuring an annual audit of public bodies;
- Awarding prizes to ATI requestors and information providers;
- Coordinating with NGOs and INGOs on ATI-related activities;
- Keeping and making available online the comprehensive list of public bodies;
- Protecting whistle-blowers.

It remains crucial to assess, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the implementation of this right. One indicator that can help monitor this effectiveness is the availability of data on the **number of requests received and how they were treated**.

Out of the 91 countries and territories with ATI laws, only 44% (40) had data in 2020 on the number of requests for information received. The remaining 56% (51) only had data from either 2018 or 2019, or no data at all. Of the latter, it is important to note that some did report having a data collection mechanism. The low number of data availability in 2020 might indicate some difficulties faced by public bodies to treat and follow up ATI requests during the pandemic.

From the data available in 2020 as reported by the 40 countries and territories, **the majority of ATI requests were granted (75% of cases)** and only 13% were denied, with the remainder being dismissed as ineligible[33] (8%) and pending (4%). This positive trend indicates the effectiveness of these countries and territories in implementing ATI guarantees. However, it is worth noting that some countries recorded gaps in terms of the number of total requests received and their breakdowns in relation to UNESCO's categories of decision. In this case, some countries explained that they adopted different manners in treating the requests. For instance, requests made by robots and those withdrawn by the requestors were not included in their follow-up systems, as was the case for requests transferred to sub-national level. In some other instances, the cases that were treated in 2020 were actually carried over from the previous year(s). This resulted in differences between the total number of decisions made and the total number of requests received.

Figure 8. Decisions taken on ATI requests in 2020



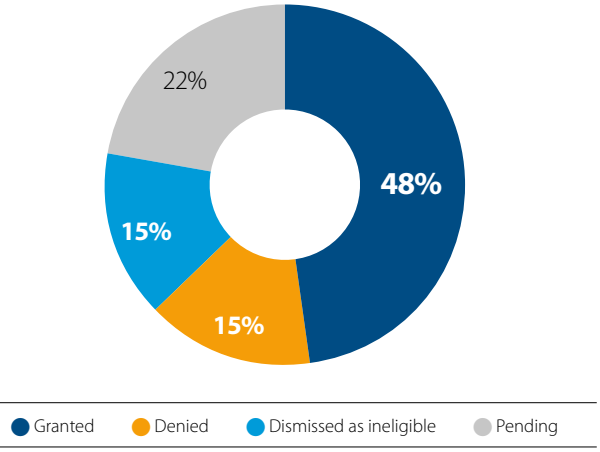
2.3.5. Appeals mechanism: Record-keeping mechanisms exist in most countries, but much needs to be done to keep the data updated for reporting purposes

An appeal is an application for a decision (or lack of a decision), which normally involves a request to reconsider failures by duty-bearers to provide information. For the purpose of this survey, statistics on appeals do not include those that were decided by courts.

Out of the 102 countries and territories, only 57% (52) had data in 2020 on requests for information received. The remaining 43% (39) only had data from either 2018 or 2019, or no data at all. Of the latter, it is important to note that some did report having a data collection mechanism. The low figure in 2020 could be due to the COVID-19 context, where a number of countries temporarily suspended existing ATI guarantees, limiting the ATI oversight institutions in performing their duties.

From the data available in 2020 as reported by the 52 countries and territories, the majority of requests were granted (48% of cases) and only 15% were denied, with the rest being dismissed as ineligible (15%) and pending (22%). However, it is worth noting that some countries recorded gaps in terms of the number of total appeals received and their breakdowns based on UNESCO's categories of decision. In this case, some countries and territories explained that the cases that were treated in 2020 were actually pending cases carried over from the previous year(s). This resulted in differences between the total number of decisions made and the total number of appeals received.

Figure 9. Decisions taken on Appeals in 2020



33 In some countries and territories, a request for information could not be upheld due to reasons other than "legal exemptions/ exceptions". This can therefore be categorised as "Dismissed as ineligible", and could include the following: incomplete applications; vexatious or repeated requests; information not in possession; information already in the public domain; requests submitted to entities other than public bodies or other bodies as permissible by law.

3.
ATI REPORTING IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

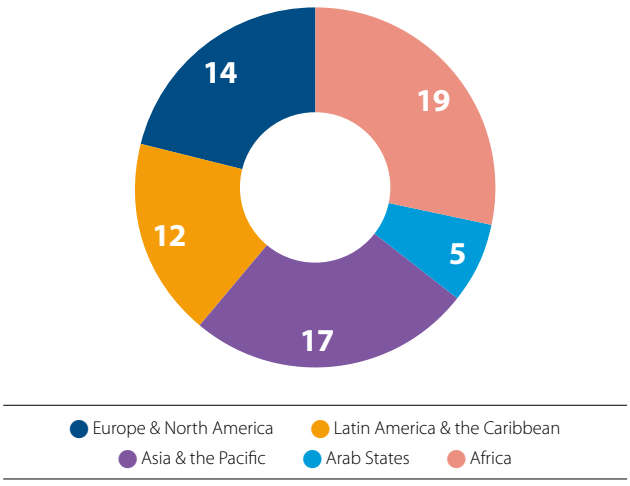
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages countries to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven". In this regard, Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)[34] serve as a follow-up and review mechanism through which countries assess and present progress made in achieving the SDGs. Countries present the VNRs, on a voluntary basis, at the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, an annual meeting under the auspices of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).[35]

In **2021**, SDG 16 was again subjected to a detailed review. Out of 42 countries that submitted their reviews, **28 countries (67%)** reported on 'access to information'.[36] Of these 42 reporting countries, 29 have a specific ATI law on public access to information.

This represents an increase from **2020**, where 18 out of 47 VNR countries (**38.3%**) addressed 'access to information' in their reports. However, it is worth noting that no specific goals were under a detailed review last year. Meanwhile in **2019**, when SDG 16 was part of a detail for review for the first time, 28 of the 47 VNR countries (**59.5%**) reported on 'access to information'.

Figure 10. Countries that reported on SDG 16.10.2 in VNRs from 2019 to 2021

(Reports by Bahamas and Guatemala are not assessed due to their unavailability on the VNR Database as of August 2021)



One of the countries that reported on SDG 16.10.2 in 2021 is **Indonesia**, who also reported on the performance of its ATI oversight institution.[37] In the context of COVID-19, the country reported on CSOs' monitoring with regards how information on health protocols is available, although only as it relates to education and public transport. Indonesia also acknowledged that the public information and communication management by the ministry/agency or local government was not well integrated during the pandemic. To improve the situation, in the Government's Work Plan (RKP) of 2021, the Government said it will strengthen socialization and information dissemination programs that are equal and fair regarding COVID-19 development, handling, and recovery. Recognizing the need to improve public access to information during emergencies, Indonesia also incorporated into its Medium-Term Development Plan of 2020-2024 several strategies to improve the quality of public information disclosure.

Another country that provided in-depth progress on ATI is **Uruguay**.[38] It reported some actions taken by its oversight institution, la Unidad de Acceso a la Información Pública (UAIP), such as the establishment of the National Index of Transparency and Access to Information that measures the level of compliance of public authorities that are under obligation to implement ATI legal frameworks. UAIP also reported on its Active Transparency audits and the development of the Gender and Right of Access to Public Information Action Plan (2020-2023), which is part of a regional project to incorporate the gender approach into transparency and ATI policies. The country also introduced the Plan of Municipal Transparency to promote a transparency management model at the local government level. With regard to COVID-19 and the health sector, the government shared some progress related to proactive disclosure through a centralised website, as well as the implementation of an inclusive public health policy for persons with disabilities that guarantees the accessibility of all published information, including the different formats, text, simple audio and sign language.

Sierra Leone and **Tunisia** also reported on SDG 16.10.2, highlighting the performance of their ATI oversight bodies. Sierra Leone reported on its Proactive Disclosure of Information scheme and its participation in the UNESCO survey on SDG 16.10.2 since 2019.[39] Tunisia reported a growing interest of the public to exercise the right to information, as evidenced from the high number of appeals processed by l'Instance Nationale d'Accès à l'Information (INAI) since its creation.[40]

Meanwhile, **Namibia** reported its progress in the drafting an Access to Information Bill, which was tabled for the first time in Parliament in 2020. The country mentioned that the bill is envisaged to give citizens greater access to information and is hoped to be passed before the end of the 2021/2022 financial year.[41]

34 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/
35 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf
36 VNR reports of Bahamas and Guatemala are not yet available for analysis during the writing of this report in August 2021.
37 P. 298-301 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/280892021_VNR_Report_Indonesia.pdf
38 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/283682021_VNR_Report_Uruguay.pdf
39 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279542021_VNR_Report_Sierra_Leone.pdf
40 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279442021_VNR_Report_Tunisia.pdf
41 P. 77 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279462021_VNR_Report_Namibia.pdf

In the past years, UNESCO has also noted that although some countries have not yet adopted a specific ATI law for public access to information, they still reported progress on ATI in other contexts. Cameroon, for instance, saw the value of access to information in promoting social inclusion of vulnerable people.[42] The United Arab Emirates presented Access to Information as an important force in increasing the efficiency of healthcare providers and as what is "needed for planning and decision-making".[43]

Table 3. SDG 16.10.2 Reporting in the VNRs (2019-2021)

Country	Year of VNRs	Adopted a specific ATI law for public access to information	Reported on "Adoption of ATI guarantees"	Reported on "ATI Implementation"*
Afghanistan	2021	●	●	
Algeria	2019		●	●
Antigua and Barbuda	2021	●	Marked in a dashboard as making progress, but without any details	
Argentina	2020	●	●	●
Austria	2020	●	●	●
Azerbaijan	2019 2021	●	= ●	 ●
Bangladesh	2020	●	●	●
Bhutan	2021			●
Bulgaria	2020	●	●	
Cabo Verde	2021			● **
Cameroon	2019			● *
Chile	2019	●	●	●
Colombia	2021	●	●	●
Congo (Republic of the)	2019		●	● *
Côte d'Ivoire	2019	●	●	●
Croatia	2019	●	●	●
Cuba	2021		● ***	
Czechia	2021	●	●	
Denmark	2021	●	●	
Dominican Republic	2021	●		●
Ecuador	2020	●	●	●
Gambia	2020		●	●
Ghana	2019	●	●	
Guyana	2019	●	●	●
Iceland	2019	●	●	
Indonesia	2019 2021	●	= ●	= ●
Israel[44]	2019	●	●	●
Japan	2021	●	●	
Kenya	2020	●	●	
Kuwait	2019		●	
Kyrgyzstan	2020	●	●	
Lesotho	2019		●	● *

42 P. 80 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24180CAMEROON_Rapport_VNR_0507_2019.pdf
43 P. 60 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20161UAE_SDGs_Report_Full_English.pdf
44 Israel withdrew from UNESCO on 31 December 2018

Madagascar	2021			
Malawi	2020	●	●	●
Malaysia	2021			●
Marshall Islands	2021			● **
Mauritius	2019			● *
Mexico	2021	●		●
Micronesia (Federated States of)	2020		●	● *
Mongolia	2019	●	●	
Morocco	2020	●	●	●
Namibia	2021		●	
New Zealand	2019	●	●	●
Nicaragua	2021	●	●	
Norway	2021	●	●	
Palau	2019	●	●	
Panama	2020	●		
Papua New Guinea	2020		●	●
Paraguay	2021	●		●
Peru	2020	●		
Philippines	2019	●	●	
Qatar	2021		Marked as making progress, but without any details	
Republic of Moldova	2020	●	●	
Rwanda	2019	●	●	
San Marino	2021	●		●
Seychelles	2020	●	●	●
Sierra Leone	2021	●	●	●
South Africa	2019	●	●	●
Spain	2021	●	●	●
Sweden	2021	●	●	
Thailand	2021	●		● **
Timor-Leste	2019	●	●	● *
Tunisia	2019 2021	●	= ●	 ●
Turkey	2019	●	●	●
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	2019	●	●	●
United Republic of Tanzania	2019	●	●	
Uruguay	2021	●	●	●
Vanuatu	2019	●	●	●
Zambia	2020		●	
Zimbabwe	2021	●	●	●

* *For the purpose of this report, implementation here refers to either implementation of ATI legal guarantees or implementation of access to information in a broader view, including by countries that have not adopted an ATI guarantee. However, this report does not include any review on SDG 9.C which focuses on access to ICT by measuring the "proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology".*

** *The implementation aspect reported by these countries is more related to 'access to media and ICT', and other human-rights issues, rather than 'access to information held by public authorities' as inscribed in SDG 16.10.2*

*** *Reported on the Constitution guaranteeing ATI*

4.
USING ACCESS TO INFORMATION TO ADVANCE THE SDGS: CASE STUDIES AND GOOD PRACTICES

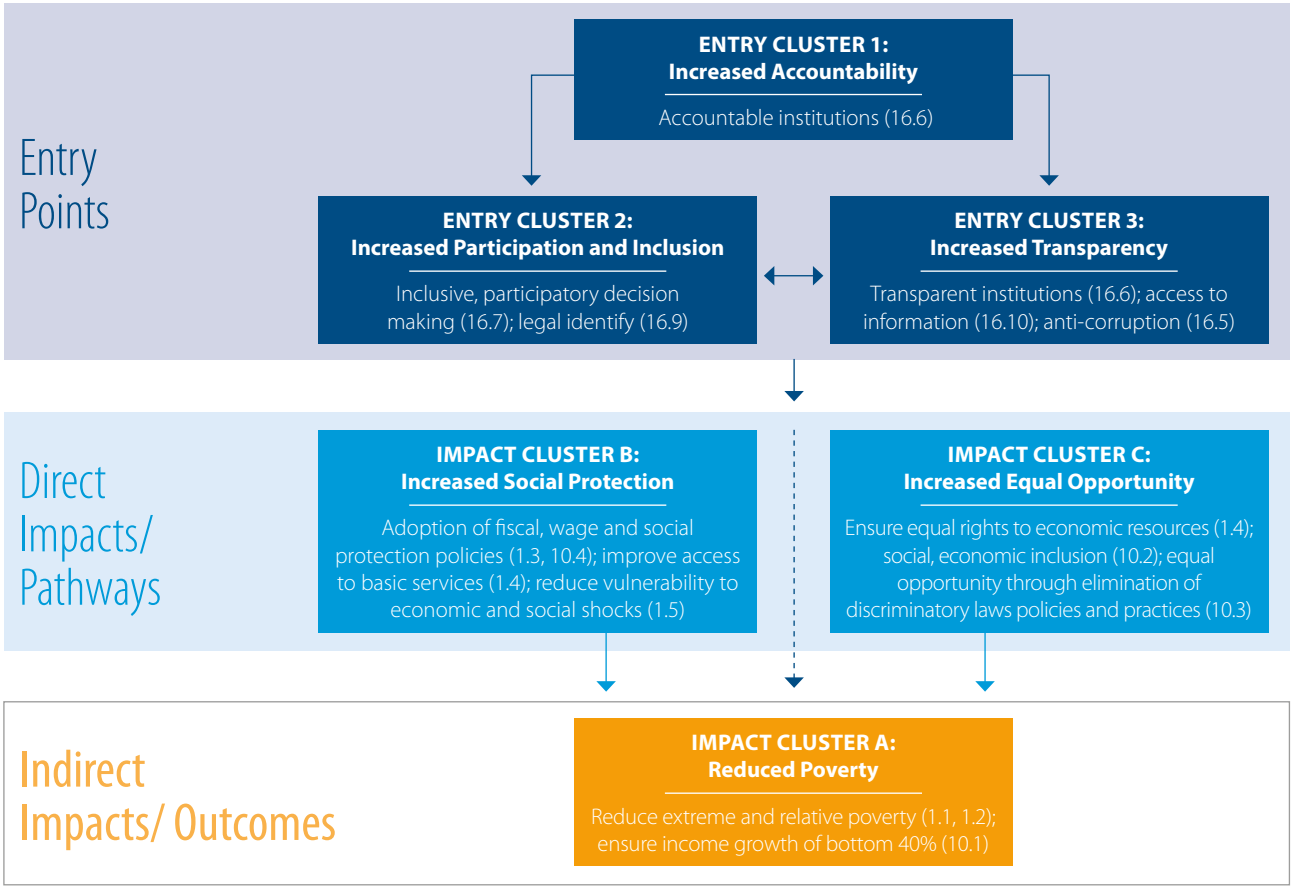
4.1. SDG 16 interlinkages: the role of Access to Information in COVID-19 recovery[45]

> The research indicates that increased accountability, greater participation and inclusion, and increased transparency have positive effects on social protection, equal opportunities and the eradication of poverty.

There is strong evidence that **progress on key aspects of SDG 16** (namely, transparency, accountability, and participation and inclusion) **has enabling effects on aspects of SDG 1 and SDG 10 that are critical for COVID-19 recovery**, namely, social protection, equal opportunities, and the eradication poverty.

Such interlinkages were studied by UNDP's Oslo Governance Centre (OGC) and the German Development Institute (DIE) between December 2020 and June 2021 through a systematic literature review of academic papers since 2015. In the context of the study, 'SDG 16 interlinkages' refer to the potential of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Inclusion) to help or hinder progress on other SDGs (SDG 16 → other SDGs).

Figure 11: Approach to prepare systematic literature review on 'SDG 16 Interlinkages' – selecting key aspects of SDG 16 (Entry Level) to examine their effects on key aspects of SDG 1 and SDG 10 (Impact Level).


Entry Points
ENTRY CLUSTER 1:
Increased Accountability
Accountable institutions (16.6)
ENTRY CLUSTER 2:
Increased Participation and Inclusion
Inclusive, participatory decision making (16.7); legal identify (16.9)
ENTRY CLUSTER 3:
Increased Transparency
Transparent institutions (16.6); access to information (16.10); anti-corruption (16.5)
Direct Impacts/ Pathways
IMPACT CLUSTER B:
Increased Social Protection
Adoption of fiscal, wage and social protection policies (1.3, 10.4); improve access to basic services (1.4); reduce vulnerability to economic and social shocks (1.5)
IMPACT CLUSTER C:
Increased Equal Opportunity
Ensure equal rights to economic resources (1.4); social, economic inclusion (10.2); equal opportunity through elimination of discriminatory laws policies and practices (10.3)
Indirect Impacts/ Outcomes
IMPACT CLUSTER A:
Reduced Poverty
Reduce extreme and relative poverty (1.1, 1.2); ensure income growth of bottom 40% (10.1)

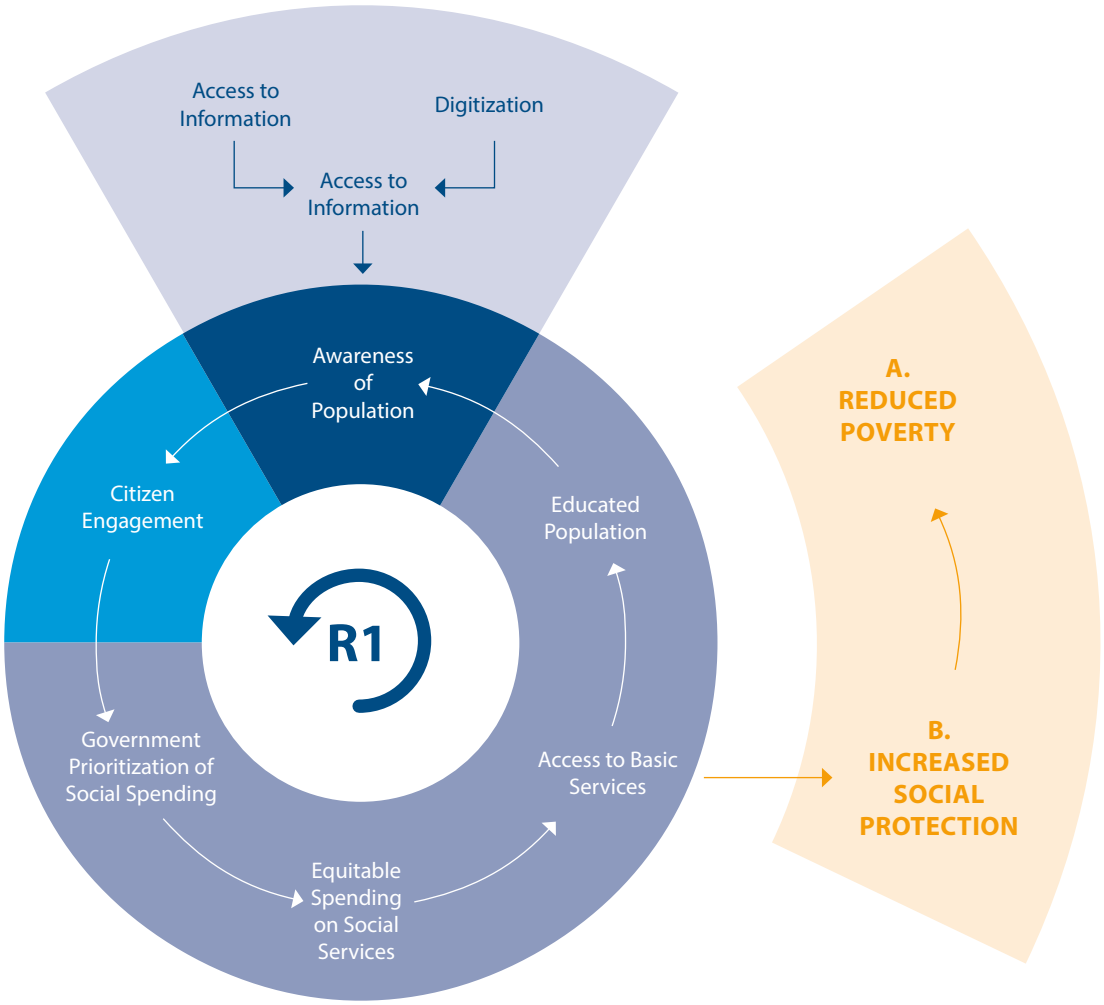
Source: UNDP OGC

45 Extracted from the study "SDG 16 Interlinkages: How does progress on SDG 16 affect progress on other SDGs?" by UNDP's Oslo Governance Centre and German Development Institute/ Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE): https://www.sdg16hub.org/topic/sdg-16-interlinkages-summary-findings

The review focused on links between key aspects of SDG 16 on the one hand ('Entry Level') and key aspects of SDG 1 (poverty reduction) and 10 (reducing inequality) on the other ('Impact Level'). With this approach, a Web of Science query yielded 426 academic papers. Through screening, 60 papers were identified as most relevant for in-depth analysis.

The review found over 100 relevant interlinkages, grouped under three SDG 16 themes: **Accountability** (SDG Indicator 16.6); **Participation and Inclusion** (SDG Indicators 16.7 and 16.9); and **Transparency** (SDG 16.6 and 16.10).

Figure 12: Reinforcing Feedback Loop R1 'Raising Awareness'



Source: UNDP OGC

As seen above, **'Access to Information'** falls under the theme **Transparency**. Of the 60 reviewed papers, 20, covering evidence from more than 145 countries, identified evidence that **increased transparency** has positive effects on SDG 1 and SDG 10. A key focus for the studies related to the **relationship between corruption and inequality and poverty** include**:**

- Corruption creates a biased tax system and supports tax evasion, which reduces revenue and undermines the capacity of governments to fairly redistribute wealth and to spend on social services, which would otherwise reduce poverty. Conversely, inequality motivates corrupt behaviour and fosters an environment in which the rich are more able to pay bribes. Enhancing contract enforcement and economic and property rights can help to control corruption and ensure fairer distribution.
- **Increased transparency** in governance and the control of corruption are crucial for **inclusive financial development**, which, in turn, **reduces income inequality**. If corruption is controlled while domestic credit and finance increase, then income inequality will decrease.

- Corruption is less likely to occur when the likelihood of being caught and punished is relatively high; this largely **depends on financial transparency, oversight, regulation and enforcement, and access to information**. Factors such as education and awareness, an independent media and higher salaries also inhibit corruption.
- Controlling corruption results in greater access to health and education services. **Increasing access to information** also **increases awareness** of target populations and **improves social protection programmes**.

The review also mapped some causal pathways and feedback loops between the studied SDGs. The feedback loops (🔄) are important for identifying key entry points, interventions and accelerators that can deliver (or undermine) desirable outcomes. Below is one such feedback loop which relates to 'Access to Information'.

The present research findings may be useful as they provide policymakers with facts to argue that investing in achieving SDG 16 will determine how societies cope with the devastating consequences of the pandemic and other current and future crises. More specifically, the findings indicate that, **when policymakers do invest in accountability, participation and transparency**, their **interventions on social protection, poverty reduction and reducing inequalities are more effective**. Understanding which aspects of SDG 16 are particularly enabling helps policymakers **focus their efforts and budgets**. The findings flag interlinkages that are enabling in many countries. They need to be verified in a given context and can then be used to prioritize policies and funding to implement them. At a time when time and money are essential to saving lives and rebuilding livelihoods, this information is more critical than ever.

4.2. Shaping the way political systems work: Access to Information for inclusive, effective and accountable institutions[46]

> There were stark differences in the average levels of Checks on Government, Clean Elections, and Impartial Administration between countries with Access to Information laws, and those without, indicating the close relationship between accountable institutions and Access to Information."
>
> **Global State of Democracy Indices,** International IDEA

Political systems are made up of formal institutions, as well as **key principles**, or substance. This substance is a set of common ideas that underpins and permeates the entire system, defining the way it works. It is the common agreements upon which politics rest and that underpin the way formal institutions operate.[47] They become an anchoring principle, and as such, they define how the system works, its 'philosophy'. A fundamental such principle, as highlighted by the Goal 16 Target 10, is the idea that citizens have **the right to know** what is happening in their political systems. Access to Information legislation is a key part of this right.

Access to information is at the heart of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, which are a cornerstone of Goal 16. Equal access to information for everyone, especially historically marginalised groups, is a key prerequisite for the building of such institutions. It is critical for political actors to be clear about how the mechanisms of inclusion, such as gender-targeted public funding for political parties or different quota systems, are prioritised in the political agenda, developed into policy and implemented. Such **transparency** is necessary for an evidence-based evaluation of progress towards more **inclusive institutions** capable of representing society in ways that can be verified.[48]

46 This analysis is a special contribution from International IDEA to UNESCO, written by Alberto Fernandez Gibaja and Alexander Hudson.
47 Daly 2019 (Daly, Tom G. Democratic Decay: Conceptualising an Emerging Research Field. Hague J Rule Law 11, 9–36. 2019: https://doi.org/10.1007/s40803-019-00086-2); Farrell and Schneier 2018 (Farrell, Henry John and Schneier, Bruce, Common-Knowledge Attacks on Democracy. October 2018: Berkman Klein Center Research Publication No. 2018-7, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3273111 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3273111).
48 International IDEA. Gender-targeted Public Funding for Political Parties: A Comparative Analysis. International IDEA. 2018

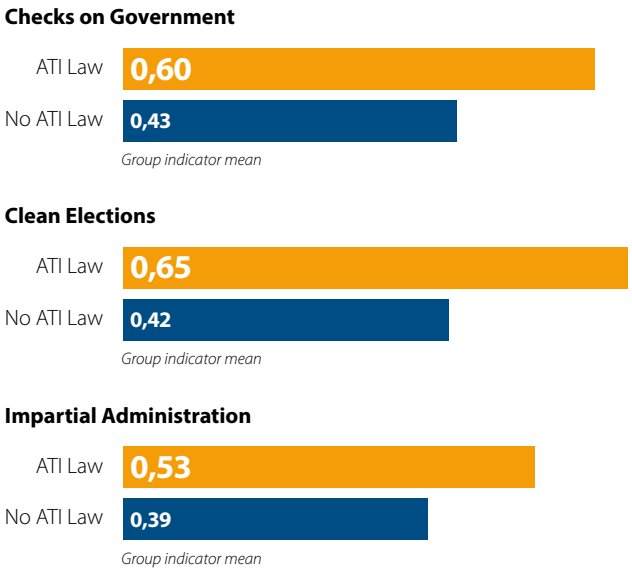
Secondly, **effective institutions** rely more and more on **data**, and proper and fair management of data relies on **openness** in the way data is handled, accessed, and managed. Securing access to such information allows institutions to harness all the potential of data effectively without compromising fundamental rights. This has been the case, for example, in the efforts to bring cheaper medicines to patients in South Africa or to drive more effective reconstruction in Nepal after the 2015 earthquakes.[49]

Lastly, is the key role that access to information laws play in creating **accountable institutions**. Accountability refers to the capacity to demand answers, voice concerns and, if needed, enforce consequences, either positive or negative, on governing actors and institutions.[50] It captures the idea that, even if decision and policy making powers are delegated to public authorities and representatives, the formal holders of power are citizens. In order to exert their power, **full and guaranteed access to information** is a *sine qua non*. For accountability to work, rights holders need to have access to the information necessary to answer all the questions they might have. Examples abound, such as the different anticorruption protests that have recently taken place, some of which were based, among other things, on the access (or rather lack of access) to information. [51] In these cases, protestors demanded more accountability from political leadership and clear consequences for corrupt practices.

At a broader level, the International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices observed there were stark differences in the average levels of **Checks on Government**, **Clean Elections**, and **Impartial Administration** between countries with Access to Information laws, and those without[52], indicating the close relationship between accountable institutions and Access to Information. This suggests that **countries with Access to Information laws** in place are, on average, **more accountable**, their institutions are **more independent** and **impartial**, and their **elections are cleaner**.

When **Access to Information is guaranteed** through constitutional, statutory or policy means, not only is a legal mechanism created, but a **change in the substance of the political system appears**. This change in the substance can permeate all levels of governance, and push authorities towards more inclusive, more effective and more accountable governance. It is upon these institutional principles that societies can flourish.

Figure 13: Checks on Government, Clean Elections, and Impartial Administration between countries with and without ATI laws.



Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975-2020; UN Statistics Division, SDG Indicators

4.3. Regional Focus: Commitment versus action in Africa - Implementation is as important as adoption of Access to Information laws

> The AFIC study noted that the relative lack of disclosure in the health sector suggests vital flaws in the institutional setup, creating a bigger gap for compromised service delivery and insufficient dissemination of key information on COVID-related issues.

As a fundamental and universal human right, access to information (ATI) is particularly relevant in the management of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in providing citizens with

49 van Schalkwyk, Young and Verhulst 2017 (van Schalkwyk. Francois, Andrew Young and Stefaan Verhulst. Code4SA Cheaper Medicines for Consumers. Open Data for Developing Economies Case Studies. July 2017); McMurren et al 2017 (McMurren, Juliet, Saroj Bista, Andrew Young and Stefaan Verhulst. Open Data to Improve disaster Relief. Open Data for Developing Economies Case Studies. July 2017).

50 Bjuremalm, Helena, Alberto Fernandez Gibaja and Jorge Valladares. Democratic Accountability in Service Delivery: A Practical Guide to Identify Improvements through Assessment. International IDEA (2014).

51 Chayes, Sarah. Fighting the Hydra: Lessons from Worldwide Protests Against Corruption. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2018.

52 International IDEA. Global State of Democracy Indices, Version 5, (1975-2020). 2021.

reliable, timely and independent information. This, however, remains a challenge even in countries with constitutional and legal guarantees for access to information.

Fifteen countries from Africa responded to the UNESCO survey. Among these, 11 countries have ATI laws, three are in progress of being elaborated and one country does not have a separate legislation on ATI. Nine countries also reported to have a dedicated oversight institution, of which six are Information Commissions. Nine countries reported that their legal guarantee on Access to Information specifies the need for public bodies to also appoint public information officers or a specific unit to handle Access to Information requests from the public. Nine countries reported provisions for the dedicated Access to Information oversight institutions to provide implementation guidance and offer training to officials from public bodies.

With this in mind, the Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC)[53] conducted in 2021 a research project[54] in some African countries assessing the state of implementation of national ATI legislation. The research found examples of restrictions to access to information and the use of emergency measures to impose broad restrictions on the speech of journalists, activists and whistle-blowers for attempting to release information on governments' capacity and handling of the pandemic. According to the researchers, the COVID-19 pandemic in these cases had challenged governments' *de facto* commitment to and implementation of the right to information.

The AFIC project aimed at sampling the level of ATI implementation in three sectors: health in the context of COVID-19; environment/climate; and financial proactive disclosure of budgets. The assessments of the level of implementation of ATI legislation in each country were based on methodology developed by the Freedom of Information Advocates Network (FOIAnet), of which AFIC is a member.

The methodology[55] assesses the extent to which countries with ATI laws are implementing them properly in accordance with three parameters: (1) the extent to which a State is proactively disclosing information; (2) the extent to which institutional measures have been put in place to assist with implementation; and (3) the extent to which requests for information are being responded to timeously and dutifully (assessed via a simple request testing approach).

The study found significant variations between countries in terms of governance arrangements and ability to adopt practices that promote transparency and accountability in regard to access to information.

A special attention of this study was put on the health sector due to its key role in providing reliable and timely access to health and COVID-19 related information. On this, the study noted that the relative lack of disclosure in the health sector suggests vital flaws in the institutional setup, creating a compromised service delivery and insufficient dissemination of key information on COVID-related issues.

Taking into consideration the findings of the AFIC study and the analysis based on the responses from the 15 African countries that responded to the UNESCO survey, it can be concluded that it is of key importance to have constitutional guarantees for ATI as well as a separate legislation on ATI. In addition to legal guarantees for ATI, an effective institutional setup is needed, including an independent ATI oversight body. Clearly defined and appointed roles and responsibilities and continuous training of duty bearers should also be introduced. In addition, there should be common standards for promoting ATI, broader collaboration between Ministries/Departments/Agencies (MDAs), periodic reviews of ATI implementation, and stronger enforcement of punitive action against non-compliance with the law. The adoption and adaption of ICT is also key for maximizing reporting capacity, cost efficiency, efficiency in record management, timeliness, and easy access to information, as well as annual work plans.

Equally important, is to maintain a strong focus on the demand side of ATI. This includes providing continuous training and sensitization to civil society. Through such training, non-state actors, both in business and civil society, should and will be able to more effectively advocate for the full implementation of systems and processes across the state sector, that would in turn enable greater access to information.

While the right to information (legislation and constitutional guarantees securing the legality of this right) is intrinsically important to transparent and accountable democratic governance, the *right* to information does not necessarily translate into *access* to information. ATI commitment and implementation by national governments, as the primary duty bearers for progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, must therefore be consistently reassessed to ensure implementation of legal provisions; and legal provisions must be adjusted continuously to meet the needs of those they seek to serve; the people.

53 The Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) is the largest membership pan-African civil society organization and resource center that promotes citizens' right of access to information, transparency and accountability across Africa. AFIC has extensive experience in successfully conducting relevant research and proposing reforms to African governments in the areas of open contracting and access to information. It also has strong experience in strengthening capacities of both governments and civil society partners and is recognized as a strong partner by procurement authorities across Africa.

54 https://africafoicentre.org/download/together-for-reliable-information-civil-society-synthesis-report-on-monitoring-sdg-16-10/

55 This study is based on data collection that was self-reported by national consultants. It is important to keep in mind that the study does not measure the entirety of any of the study countries' implementation of their respective ATI legislation. Rather, the study has provided a random sampling of MDAs in three sectors (health in the context of COVID-19; environment/climate; and financial proactive disclosure of budgets) to give a snapshot of the state of ATI implementation of those institutions/sectors.

4.4. National Focus: Promoting proactive transparency during COVID-19 in Mexico

Figure 14: Proactive transparency platform of Mexico's INAI

inai
CONÓCENOS PROYECTOS ACERVO DOCUMENTAL MULTIMEDIA EVENTOS CURSOS COMUNIDAD DE PRÁCTICA OTROS SITIOS
English
COVID-19
TRANSPARENCIA PROACTIVA
Conocimiento Público Útil
¿Qué es el Coronavirus?
Los coronavirus son una familia de virus que causan enfermedades (desde el resfriado común hasta enfermedades respiratorias más graves) y circulan entre humanos y animales.
En este caso, se trata del SARS-COV2. Apareció en China en diciembre pasado y provoca una enfermedad llamada COVID-19, que se extendió por el mundo y fue declarada pandemia global por la Organización Mundial de la Salud.

As part of its policy on proactive transparency, the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information Protection of Personal Data (INAI) of Mexico has developed a platform[56] to promote the dissemination of useful and reliable information about the COVID-19 pandemic to the general public and the authorities.

Developed in March 2020, the platform – also called as the "COVID-19 microsite" – processes, systematizes, publishes and disseminates information about the pandemic. With one of the aims being to generate reassurance among the public during the health crisis, the platform makes visible the strategies, actions and measures that are part of the public health policy adopted by the Federal Government in Mexico.

The platform also allows visitors to consult statistics related to access to information (ATI) requests about COVID-19 and the types of information that are frequently requested. This way, public authorities can identify the kind of information that they need to publish proactively, while anticipating the responses they need to provide. As of 15 May 2021, as many as 43,556 requests had been analyzed. The information is updated every 15 days to generate the following statistics: a) top 5 requests by categories; b) status of responses to requests; c) type of response provided by the obligated entities (public authorities that are under obligation to respond the requests); d) top 10 obligated entities with the highest number of requests; and e) historical behaviour of the ATI requests per day. By making available information on the performance of the authorities, as well as the measures and strategies implemented for the management of health crisis, the platform has also stimulated the accountability among public authorities.

Visitors can also access the open data section, where the complete database containing the ATI requests can be downloaded and repurposed for analysis and other uses. The platform also incorporates national and local transparency portals that concentrate useful information on COVID-19. As of 2021, portals of 14 state-level oversight agencies have been integrated into the platform: Morelos, Nuevo León, Quintana Roo, Oaxaca, Estado de Mexico, Veracruz, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Guerrero, Durango, Chiapas and Puebla.

56 https://micrositios.inai.org.mx/gobiernoabierto/?page_id=6775

4.5. National Focus: Access to information by local authorities in Ukraine during the COVID-19 pandemic[57]

Figure 15: Key survey results

Source: Infographics by UNDP

57 See "Enabling the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through SDG16+: 2021 Epilogue" by the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies; source: UNDP Ukraine. Infographics in English and the full report in Ukrainian is available here: https://www.ua.undp.org/content/ukraine/en/home/library/democratic_governance/access-to-public-info-re-covid-response.html

Access to reliable information related to COVID-19 is of critical importance to provide the opportunity for the public to make informed decisions about their health and security. For this reason, the regional network of the Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights conducted a rapid monitoring on how local authorities were publishing information about protective measures against COVID-19, and how they address citizens' freedom of information requests. Through this monitoring exercise, regional coordinators assessed the work of 74 subnational authorities through analysis of the local authorities' responses to the freedom of information requests and evaluation of their official websites.

The survey concluded that **information holders mostly publish information** about protective measures against COVID-19 systematically and on time. However, some local authorities **need to take measures for the improvement** of access to information, namely its **comprehensiveness**.

Based on the findings of the survey, UNDP experts provided recommendations on how local authorities can enhance the provision of access to public information and widely promoted them through the regional network of the Ombudsperson's Office.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. Information holders, state authorities and local governments during the quarantine period must ensure requests for public information can be submitted at all times by email. Email addresses for making requests must be published on the official websites so that everyone can easily find them.

2. It is necessary to organize the work of public officials and divisions responsible for access to public information in such way that they can process requests and provide access to information in a timely manner. Replies to the requests should be:

   - Submitted on an official form with the letterhead of the information holder, and with the registration number and signature of the responsible person;
   - Sent from an official email address for requests for access to public information, or from the official email of the information holder.

3. Regulatory and normative acts on protective measures against the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) must be immediately published on official websites. Information holders must publish full texts of these normative acts, mentioning the date when they were adopted, and their registration number. Plans of protective measures and details of where to request additional information must be published too. Easy navigation of the website is also important.

CONCLUSION

Reporting on SDG 16.10.2 serves as an incentive for countries to improve their legal regulatory frameworks, their implementation and/or their enforcement of Access to Information (ATI). In this regard, the UNESCO survey, which provides a standardised approach to monitoring SDG 16.10.2, has proven **useful for countries** in measuring and reporting progress on ATI at the national level, including through the Voluntary National Reviews, the Universal Periodic Review that concerns the human rights records, the Follow-up Mechanism for the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (*Mecanismo de Seguimiento a la Convención Interamericana contra la Corrupción,* MESICIC), and parliaments.

The findings of the survey in this report suggest that having a specialised ATI oversight institution is fundamental to ensure ATI law implementation and enforcement. This was made evident by the higher scores obtained by countries and territories that have such a **specialized institution**. Experience around the world shows that these institutions play key roles in advocating for standards and good practices, as well as helping to address challenges in ATI implementation.

The low level of data availability for 2020 reinforces the need for the ATI oversight institutions to improve their **record-keeping** systems. Fortunately, ATI oversight institutions in some countries and territories provide good examples in reorganizing their working methods during the pandemic, which can be replicated by other countries and territories. Since what cannot be measured cannot be improved, it is vital to ensure adequate and reliable records of the requests and appeals received, so that evidence can be generated to track progress. Good evidence-based reporting can also help ATI oversight institutions in negotiating for financial and technical resources with policymakers and other stakeholders, which in turn would help address the challenges related to management and limited resources.

Emerging from the 2021 survey process, it is important that central bodies responsible for the SDGs **involve ATI oversight institutions and their networks** in SDG processes at the national and regional levels. UNESCO's experience shows that these networks are indispensable in the improvement of ATI monitoring and reporting processes. As also implied by SDG 17, the power to drive change is vested in alliances and partnerships. The International Conference of Information Commissioners, *Red de Transparencia y Acceso a la Informacion* and the International Ombudsman Institute have all demonstrated successful collaborations in replicating and scaling-up initiatives that have accelerated both the adoption and the implementation of ATI guarantees.

Equally important is to strengthen the involvement of **civil society** in the monitoring and reporting on SDG 16.10.2. While the UNESCO survey provides an opportunity for governments to make a self-assessment against their own performance, monitoring and reporting by civil society can offer alternative data and perspective. Having a direct access to the grassroots level, civil society can also help ensure that women and vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, are included in the ATI agenda.

With nine years left to achieve the SDGs, and with global challenges becoming more interconnected, the message is clear that access to information should be the thread that binds together the diverse actions in rebuilding communities and strengthening public institutions towards 2030 and beyond.

Building forward stronger with Access to Information

As countries are trying to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of access to information continues to be critical in re-building communities and their public institutions. The need for openness, transparency and accountability has never been stronger. The world has witnessed a growing public appetite for information that is accurate, timely and reliable. With civic space becoming more reduced during the pandemic, access to information has helped counterbalance the situation, enabling public participation and civic engagement in response to the crisis.

As the UN custodian agency for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicator 16.10.2, UNESCO continues to report on progress on the adoption and the implementation of Access to Information guarantees worldwide. The Organization also promotes efforts around the issue, including reinforcing the strong relevance of access to information to crisis recovery and the attainment of the SDGs as a whole.

This report captures these different dimensions, presenting key findings from the 2021 UNESCO Survey on Public Access to Information, assessing progress in 102 participating countries and territories. The report also provides policy makers, civil society, academia, and those interested in SDG issues with different case studies and good practices with a special focus on rebuilding communities and public institutions with access to information.

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